



AZ Response to Intervention (RTI)

Secondary Technical Assistance Paper

Purpose

Response to Intervention (RTI) is referenced in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act as well as in the individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization of 2004. RTI represents a systemic method for evaluating the needs of all students and for fostering positive student outcomes through carefully selected and implemented interventions. It also may be used to assist schools in identifying students who may require more intensive instructional services and/or be eligible for an exceptional student education program. The purpose of this document is to provide an introduction and clarity on the nature of the RTI model for both general and exceptional student education personnel as it applies to students with and without disabilities of all categorical types who are not progressing adequately in the core curriculum academically and/or behaviorally. This document also provides background and initial information about the new option under IDEA 2004 and includes information/guidance to help make decisions regarding the possible use of RTI in determination of eligibility for exceptional student education (see later in this document). This document is an initial step in the extensive professional development necessary for the full successful implementation of RTI.

Why Use the Response to Intervention Model?

Nationally some of the results of using an RTI method are:

- Students receive interventions based on reliable and valid data earlier than in the “wait to fail” scenario (discrepancy requirement);
- RTI identifies specific skill deficits, whereas teacher referrals are more frequently general statements of need;
- Scientifically-based interventions are used more frequently and earlier;
- Racial disproportionality is reduced in programs for students with learning disabilities and cognitive disabilities;

- Adequate yearly progress (benchmarks) and disaggregated data (NCLB) move focus of attention to student progress, not student labels;
- Building principals and superintendents want to know if students are achieving benchmarks, regardless of whether the students will be exposed to interventions that maximize their rate of progress;
- Effective interventions result from a combination of valid and reliable information from assessment and from good problem solving;
- Progress monitoring is done best with valid and reliable assessments that are sensitive to small changes in student academic and social behavior;
- Interventions must be evidence-based (NCLB/IDEA);
- Response to intervention (RTI) is the best measure of problem severity;
- Program eligibility (initial and continued) decisions are best made based on RTI because it links directly to instruction;
- Staff training and support (e.g., coaching) improve intervention skill; and
- Intervention tiered implementation improves service efficiency and decreases delayed services due to the discrepancy requirement.

The facts about secondary literacy are startling:

- Approximately two-thirds of eighth- and twelfth- grade students read at less than the “proficient” level as described by NAEP (National Institute for Literacy, 2006).
- Approximately 32 percent of high school graduates are not ready for college-level English composition courses (ACT, 2005).
- 40% of high school students cannot read well enough to benefit from their textbooks (NAEP).
- Over half of adults scoring at the lowest literacy levels are drop-outs and almost a quarter are high school graduates (NCES, 2005).
- Approximately 40 percent of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek (Achieve, Inc., 2005).
- U.S. drop-outs’ literacy skills are lower than most industrialized nations, performing comparably only to Chile, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia (OECD, 2000).
- A full 70 percent of U.S. middle and high school students require differentiated instruction—that is, instruction targeted to their

individual strengths and weaknesses (Alliance for Excellent Education for the Carnegie Corporation of New York).

An additional reality is most students are not arriving at our nation's high schools with grade level reading skills. Less than a third of the nation's adolescents demonstrate proficiency with grade level reading skills and expectations; even worse, only one in seven low-income students are meeting grade level expectations (National Center of Education Statistics, 2005).

In the elementary years, reading instruction focuses on *basic reading*: phonics/decoding, fluency, and comprehension of narrative and simple informational text. The type of instruction needed for most students to be successful with content area reading and writing changes drastically in middle and high school. Students in middle and high schools are bombarded with a wide variety of complex expository and descriptive text, technical content vocabulary, and writing requirements of content classes. Most students know how to read on at least a literal level when they enter high school. In other words, they can decode and comprehend basic information when reading straightforward text. However, many do not know how to "read to learn" more complex texts on their own; they do not know how to independently use reading, writing, and critical thinking strategies to comprehend information, construct meaning, question the author's thinking against other text or their own experiences, or synthesize new information and ideas to new situations. Literacy instruction at the high school level should support students to continue developing reading fluency; improving vocabulary knowledge; developing higher-level reasoning and thinking skills; improving reading comprehension strategies, and increasing student motivation and engagement with reading and writing (Torgeson et al., 2007).

The evidence is clear that our secondary schools are in need of a better way to educate our students. 1.2 million High schools students drop out annually and many of our inner city communities graduate only one in three students.

Dougherty High School in Colorado reported these changes after implementing an RTI model:

- An increased graduation rate to 84.1 percent.
- A decreased dropout rate to 0.88 percent.
- A freshman failure rate that was reduced by 57 percent, with 91 percent of ninth graders reporting a smooth adjustment to high school.

- A 62 percent growth in enrollment in AP classes and a 25 percent growth in enrollment in honors classes.
- Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004, 2006, and 2007 (31 of 33 AYP indicators/subgroup targets achieved in 2005). A ranking of "high" on the Colorado School Accountability Report for 2004 through 2007.

Before school administration begins to implement a Response to Intervention program they need to be sure that there are not conflicting educational directions that may make it impossible to properly implement RTI. Remember this is a 4-5 year process. In addition, school leaders need to understand the best methods for implementing change. It is essential that leaders and teams understand how schools move to new directions in a change process. They must understand the staff development standards that lead to school change.

RTI is based upon the belief that all students can learn and that only 4-5% (the most severely disabled) are not capable of achieving grade level benchmarks. Before beginning to implement change, a school administrator must get consensus that the staff believes that "all students will learn". In order to successfully implement RTI we can no longer hold prejudicial belief systems that blame student's lack of success in school on their social status, economic status, language skills or any other excuse for not being successful in school.

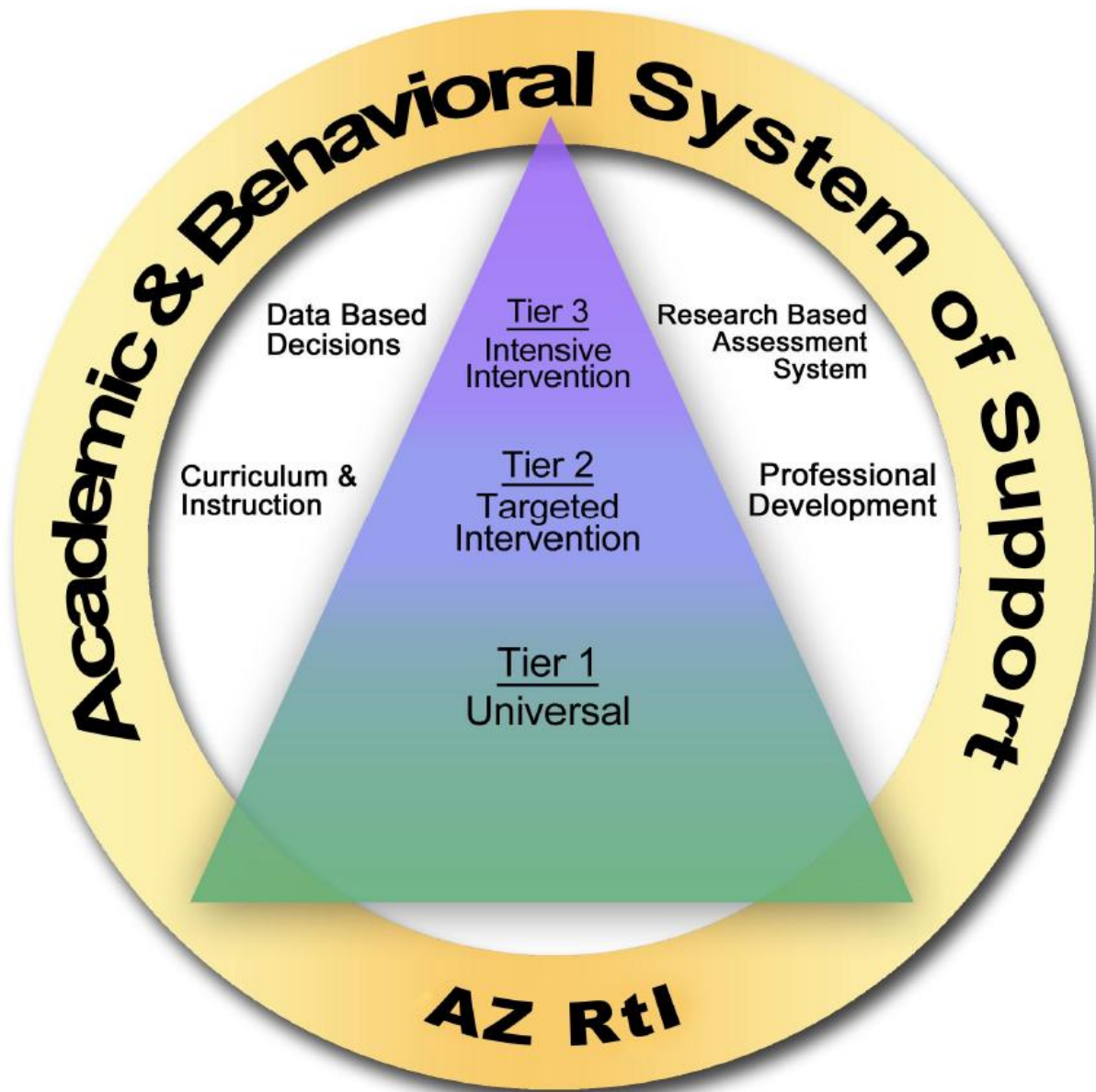
The components of this RTI model are somewhat based upon the Content Literacy Curriculum developed at Kansas University. The learning strategies portions are based upon work by Sharon Vaughn. "Content area teachers need to be engaged in a unified approach to literacy instruction in which they acquire proficiency in two to four high impact strategies/practices that they use consistently within their area of instruction." John Guthrie has also voiced the need for content teachers to teach learning skills.

"Comprehension strategies should be taught explicitly through reading and writing activities across the curriculum. All teachers within a grade should teach a common set of three to four reading strategies in each content area."

The core characteristics of secondary RTI include:

- Students receive high-quality, differentiated, instruction in their general education setting
- The teaching and continued use of 3-5 literacy strategies in the content education setting
- Evidence-based general education instruction with a focus on using literacy within the content areas

- General education instructors and staff assume an active role in students' assessment in that curriculum
- Continuous progress monitoring of student performance with individual student plans written at Tier 2 and Tier 3.
- Progress monitoring data to determine effectiveness of interventions and to make any modifications
- Continuous progress monitoring to pinpoint students' difficulties
- Research-validated interventions to address the student's difficulties
- Systematic assessment of the fidelity and integrity with which core instruction and specific interventions are implemented
- Multiple tiers of increasingly intense student-focused interventions
- Use of early warning system to identify possible drop outs
- Tiered system of support for students at risk to drop out



Academic & Behavioral System of Support

Tier 1: Universal instruction (all students): This tier has two components. The first is reading instruction that occurs in language arts classes. Learning to read expository and narrative text at increasingly higher levels is essential to improving student preparedness for graduation and post high school. South Carolina found that for every 1 point it increased 8th grade reading rate the HS graduation rate rose by .8%. Therefore, it is imperative that the content of secondary language arts classes be revisited. Advanced reading skills, as well as introductions to, and the study of,

literature, need to be taught. The second focus is literacy instruction imbedded in the other content curriculum (History, Science, Health, etc.) received by all students in the school. In this model, each content teachers will teach and use two to four predetermined instructional strategies to help the students access the content material. These instructional/learning strategies are the specific *strategies* students learn to use independently to understand new concepts or master skills. In addition to the learning strategies, the universal classroom teachers will learn how to differentiate their instruction so that all students may access the curriculum.

At tier I the instruction is large group education that all students receive in the content areas of the school. This instruction should be evidence based curriculum that has been aligned with the Arizona State standards and builds content literacy. This instruction should be differentiated, explicit, scaffolded and direct. The school will focus on 3-4 specific learning (comprehension) strategies. Each content teacher is trained on these chosen strategies. These teachers will teach the students the strategies and use them on a daily basis in the content classrooms. Here are a few of the many methods of building literacy skills in the content area.

- Pre-Reading Strategy
- Vocabulary Strategies
- Graphic Organizers
- Directed Reading Activity
- Directed Reading Thinking Activity
- Post-Reading Strategy
- Cornell Note Taking Strategy
- Concept definition/mapping/graphic organizing
- Meta cognition
- Before During After
- I do, we do , you do
- Reciprocal Teaching

The following learning/comprehension strategies are conducive to cross content area use and are an excellent place to start.

Frayer model for vocabulary skills:

The Frayer Model is a graphic-organizer used for word analysis and vocabulary building. This four-square model prompts students to think about and describe the meaning of a word or concept by . . .

- Defining the term,
- Describing its essential characteristics,
- Providing examples of the idea, and
- Offering non-examples of the idea.

This strategy stresses understanding words within the larger context of a reading selection by requiring students, first, to analyze the items (definition and characteristics) and, second, to synthesize/apply this information by thinking of examples and non-examples.

Steps to the Frayer Model:

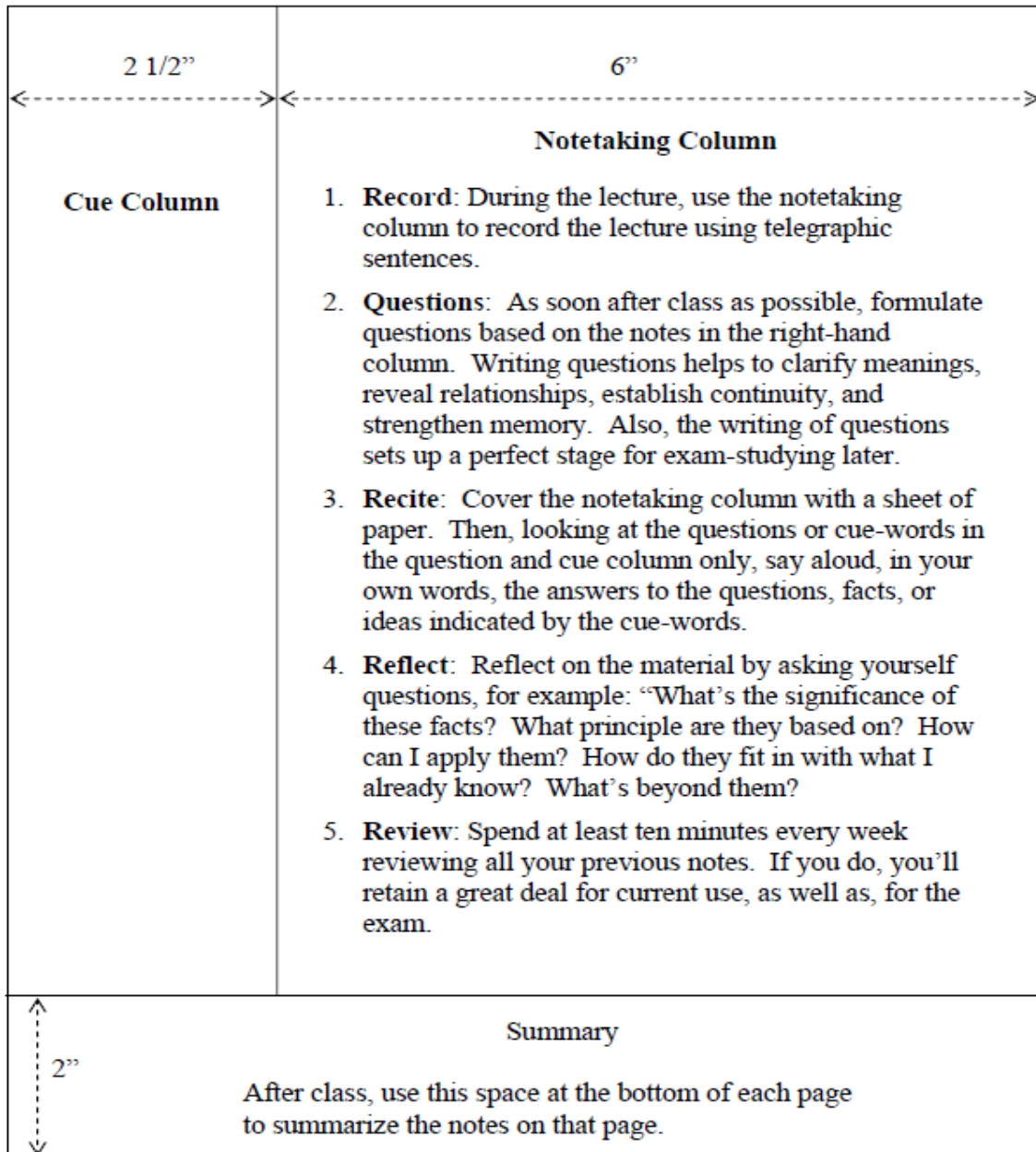
1. Explain the Frayer model graphical organizer to the class. Use a common word to demonstrate the various components of the form. Model the type and quality of desired answers when giving this example.
2. Select a list of key concepts from a reading selection. Write this list on the chalkboard and review it with the class before students read the selection.
3. Divide the class into student pairs. Assign each pair one of the key concepts and have them read the selection carefully to define this concept. Have these groups complete the four-square organizer for this concept.
4. Ask the student pairs to share their conclusions with the entire class. Use these presentations to review the entire list of key concepts.

Frayer Model

Definition	Characteristics
Examples	Non-examples

WORD

The Cornell Note-taking System



Reciprocal teaching:

Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher and students take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading this dialogue.

Purpose: The purpose of reciprocal teaching is to facilitate a group effort between teacher and students as well as among students in the task of bringing meaning to the text. Each strategy was selected for the following purpose:

- **Summarizing** provides the opportunity to identify and integrate the most important information in the text. Text can be summarized across sentences, across paragraphs, and across the passage as a whole. When the students first begin the reciprocal teaching procedure, their efforts are generally focused at the sentence and paragraph levels. As they become more proficient, they are able to integrate at the paragraph and passage levels.
- **Question generating** reinforces the summarizing strategy and carries the learner one more step along in the comprehension activity. When students generate questions, they first identify the kind of information that is significant enough to provide the substance for a question. They then pose this information in question form and self-test to ascertain that they can indeed answer their own question. Question generating is a flexible strategy to the extent that students can be taught and encouraged to generate questions at many levels. For example, some school situations require that students master supporting detail information; others require that the students be able to infer or apply new information from text.
- **Clarifying** is an activity that is particularly important when working with students who have a history of comprehension difficulty. These students may believe that the purpose of reading is saying the words correctly; they may not be particularly uncomfortable that the words, and in fact the passage, are not making sense. When the students are asked to clarify, their attention is called to the fact that there may be many reasons why text is difficult to understand (e.g., new vocabulary, unclear reference words, and unfamiliar and perhaps difficult concepts). They are taught to be alert to the effects of such impediments to comprehension and to take the necessary measures to restore meaning (e.g., reread, ask for help).
- **Predicting** occurs when students hypothesize what the author will discuss next in the text. In order to do this successfully, students must activate the relevant background knowledge that they already possess regarding the topic. The students have a purpose for reading: to confirm or disprove their hypotheses. Furthermore, the opportunity has been created for the students to link the new knowledge they will encounter in the text with the knowledge they already possess. The predicting strategy also facilitates use of text structure as students learn that headings, subheadings, and questions imbedded in the text are useful means of anticipating what might occur next.

Tier 2: Targeted Instruction: (Learning strategies+word skills)

In Tier II, students who have been identified through screening and have not achieved benchmark literacy skills, receive additional educational time that is delivered in a small group setting. Intervention classes are designed to

give reinforcement and practice for the strategies that were taught in the content classes. In addition, time will be devoted to teaching any word level skill gaps that the students have. (Example 30 min. learning strategy support and 30 min. word level skills) This time is designed to improve reading skills and to assist students in accessing and using the content in the core curriculum. The classroom focus will be on providing the practice time to improve the content literacy skills that occur in Tier 1. In most secondary schools this is going to be a class period where the student is assigned as part of their schedule. Some types of supplemental curriculum are: Read Naturally, Success Maker, Read 180, Rewards (fluency), Corrective Reading (decoding), Corrective Reading (comprehension), Recovery Reading, Eduss, Study Island, Kid Biz also check out this web site for more information: <http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/CReportsCS.aspx?rep=supp>

Students should be progress monitored bi-weekly and those who do not show progress toward meeting their goals will be assessed to find why they are not achieving. Progress monitoring may use reading mazes and will also include bi-weekly data on content classroom performance. Other progress monitoring tools are: DIBELS (fluency), AIMSweb, ISteep, TOWRE Test of Word Reading Efficiency (Decoding) Mazes (comprehension). Continual failure to respond could mean they need more intensive intervention.

Tier 3 Intensive instruction (about 5% of students): Instruction provided to students who are significantly (< fourth grade) behind their classmates in the development of critical reading skills. This instruction will usually be guided by assessment of the specific skill gaps the student displays. Materials should include evidence based programs that will improve the word level skills to the point that the student may begin to access the curriculum. Many of the students have gaps in either, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency or comprehension. The intervention program should include these 5 elements of reading. Each student is assessed for their skill gaps and has an individual plan and goals based upon their skill deficits. These interventions would be in a classroom with groupings of 3 or 4 to 1. Each student would have their own plan and goals. Students could be placed in this classroom first if their skills were so low that they could not benefit from Tier 2. They would still be in the universal content classrooms and would also receive Tier 2 interventions while in this class. Progress monitoring should be at least once a week.

How Should the Three Intervention Tiers of the RTI Model Be Implemented?

Each intervention tier of the RTI model defines the level and intensity of services required for a student to progress. All students receive tier one instruction, some will need tier two interventions to be successful, and a few will need tier three services. The three intervention tiers are on a continuum that is fluid; a student may receive services within Tier2, then move forward to receive more intensive Tier 3 services or backward to receive less intensive Tier 1 services. The students' level of need dictates the level of support. The actual length of time that an intervention is implemented depends on the student's response to the intervention and realistic time periods required for the target skills to develop. It is possible that students will receive interventions in more than one Tier at any given time. In Tier 2 services, the multidisciplinary intervention team, which should always include the classroom teacher, plans the interventions, arranges supports for the intervention process, monitors progress, and makes formative and summative evaluations of the students' response to intervention. Students who improve as a result of interventions at Tier 2 may no longer need Tier 2 interventions and may be successful with just core instruction. Some students may display significant progress but continue to need supports. These students may continue in Tier 2 or move back to Tier 1 if the level of support required is more minimal. However, students who are not successful with Tier 2 services despite appropriate interventions over time may be considered for Tier 3 services. A student's level of risk is assessed based on how much of a gap exists between the students' actual level of performance and the performance of peers. When the performance of a student indicates that the level of risk has changed from greater to lesser or when the performance of a student has improved within a specific risk level, then the student's response to intervention is considered positive.

The data used for RTI decisions are derived from assessments that measure student achievement within the context of the classroom curriculum. The data are a necessary link between assessment and academic interventions and are sensitive to small changes over time. In the RTI model, assessment is used for the purpose of screening, collecting diagnostic information, and monitoring progress.

Because students struggle to achieve for a variety of reasons, the goal of assessment within each tier is to determine the barriers that inhibit learning and to alter instruction accordingly. Barriers may include existing or identified disability, insufficient or inadequate instruction, poor attendance, limited academic engagement, emotional or behavioral concern, limited opportunities for developmental enrichment, and/or limited English proficiency. Parents are an invaluable source of information in the identification of barriers affecting the progress of a student. When these factors are eliminated as the reason for inadequate progress and the student

requires Tier 3 services to progress, special education may be considered. Using a three tiered model for RTI systemically addresses the ultimate question: what works for this student who is in need of academic support? Because student needs vary so greatly, the services provided within each tier will vary.

Step by step process for RTI.

Step 1: School preparation:

The staff receives professional development on RTI and the school team is trained. The school completes the AZ Self Assessment and has the infrastructures in place to support RTI. The school identifies 3-5 literacy strategies that will be taught and used daily in all classes.

STEP 2: Student Screening:

AIMS scores are looked at and all incoming students and current students who have not met or exceeded the reading standard are given a screening assessment. Student who fall below the benchmark on the screener are assigned a Tier 2 intervention class. If a student's skill level is below the 4th grade they would be assigned directly to a Tier 3 (intensive) intervention class. Students who are above the benchmark are put on a monitoring plan where their school performance is regularly evaluated. They may need to go to the targeted intervention class. A few students may have such severe skill deficits that they need to move to the Tier 3 intensive class first. Some unified districts screen all eighth graders before they leave the 8th grade. This allows the high school to develop a master schedule during the summer instead of waiting until the fall and finding out that they needed many more or less intervention classes. Some types of screeners include: DIBELS (fluency), AIMSweb, ISteep, TOWRE Test of Word Reading Efficiency (Decoding) Mazes (comprehension), Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), also see:

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/htmldocs/interventions/cbmwarehouse.php>

STEP 3: A plan is written for each student, including curriculum and a specific goal with an aim line that will meet the goal. Students are placed in a small group intervention class; this would most likely take the place of one of their electives. In the class they are progress monitored bi-weekly. Some of the class time would be spent on content access assistance (Tier 2) and some would be spent on literacy skill deficits (Tier 3).

STEP 4: Students who fall below their aim line with three consecutive progress monitoring probes, are evaluated and a change is made in the interventions. If a student is not successful after several changes they may need to move to the (Tier 3) intensive classroom.

STEP 5: A plan is written for students who have moved to intensive intervention (Tier 3). Instruction is no more than 1 to 4 student teacher ratio. Assessments are given and specific skill deficits are addressed. Goals and aim lines are written and students are progress monitored weekly.

What is necessary to implement RTI?

- A targeted, sustained commitment of 4-5 years by administrators and the majority of the staff is necessary to impact targeted outcomes and build capacity to continue over time.
- A school self assessment and plan is completed. (See AZ Self Assessment).
- Staff consensus must be at least 80%.
- Decision making team structures must be in place, that are independent of persons and personalities.
- The resources needed to launch and sustain an initiative must be committed and protected. The impact of adding a new initiative on top of other initiatives must be carefully analyzed. Start up should be delayed until the new initiative can be moved to sustainability.

What Is the Background of Eligibility Criteria for Specific Learning Disabilities?

Since the 1960's, there has been controversy surrounding the criteria for the identification of students with specific learning disabilities. Until 2004, the standard was a discrepancy between ability and achievement in one or more of seven articulated areas that could not be explained by other factors. In

Arizona, the extent of the discrepancy required for identification is established by each public education agency and there is considerable variability across the state.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) provides for a variety of decision-making options for the identification of children with specific learning disabilities (SLD). The procedures identified in 34 CFR. §300.307 for SLD identification include:

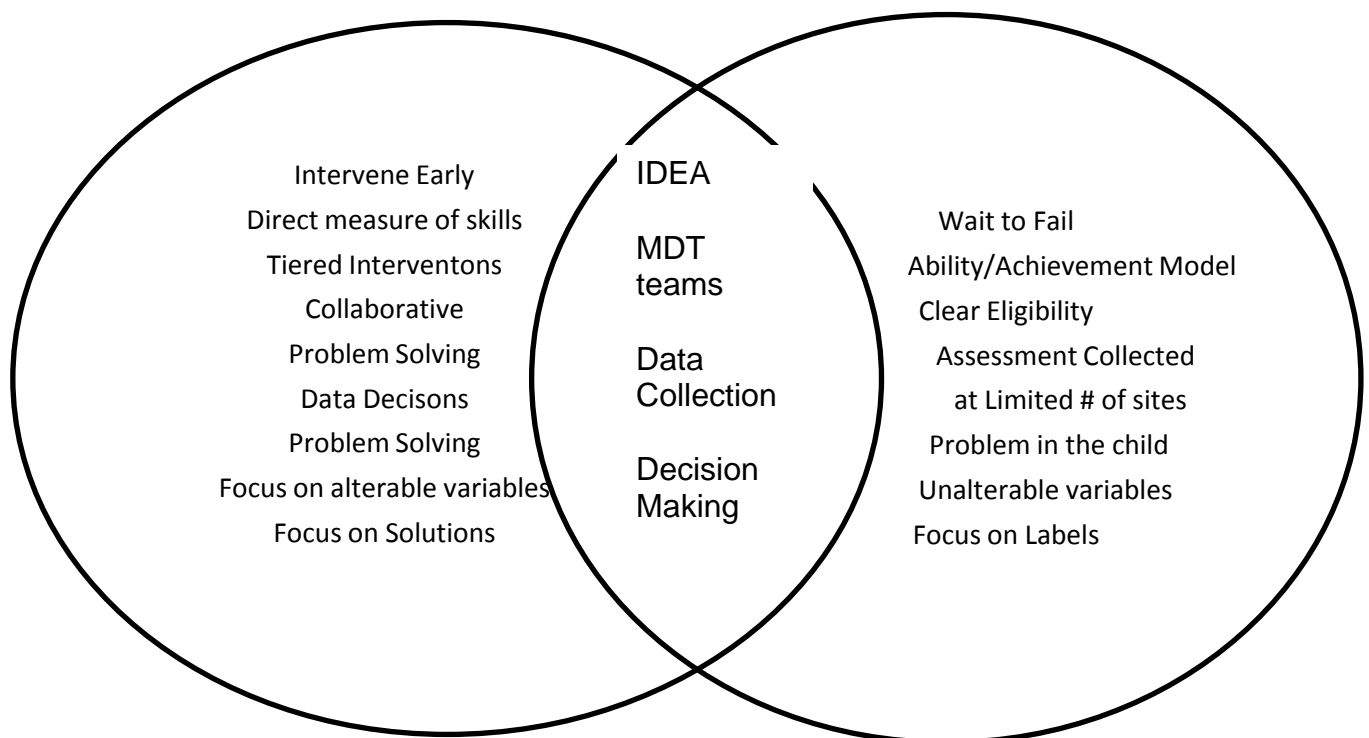
- Following state criteria consistent with 34 CFR §§300.301-300.311;
- Prohibiting a state requirement to use a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement;
 - Arizona neither requires nor prohibits the use of a discrepancy model for the identification of SLD.
 - Arizona does require each public education agency to establish criteria for the identification of SLD regardless of the method(s) of identification used within the agency.
- Permitting the use of a process which is based on a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention, also known as response to intervention (RTI);
 - Arizona requires the submission of an RTI Statement of Assurance signed by the chief administrative officer and special education director prior to the use of RTI as a component of an evaluation to identify students with specific learning disabilities.
- Permitting the use of other alternative research-based procedures;
 - To date, Arizona has not identified other procedures.

Therefore, the process options for the identification of SLD include the identification of a pattern of child's strengths and weakness through:

1. Determination of failure to respond to intervention (RTI) when provided through a tiered instructional approach and other appropriate measures;
2. Determination based on individual assessment data (including but not limited to an IQ-Achievement discrepancy), other appropriate measures, a combination of

How Does the Response to Intervention Model Compare to the Discrepancy Model?

The discrepancy model currently used to determine eligibility for specific learning disability (SLD) services focuses on the discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic performance, whereas RTI focuses in large part on the discrepancy between student performance and benchmarks as well as pre- and post-intervention levels of performance. The Venn diagram below illustrates important similarities and differences.



How Can RTI Be Used to Determine Eligibility for Special Education?

No decision regarding SLD eligibility can be made by an IEP/Evaluation team without substantial information about a student's achievement levels in the areas of:

- Oral expression;
- Listening comprehension;
- Written expression;
- Basic reading skills;
- Reading fluency skills;
- Reading comprehension;
- Mathematics calculation;
- Mathematics reasoning.

If an education agency has a general education process based on a child's response to progressively intense interventions (RTI) in place and can demonstrate that a child is not making adequate progress in spite of those interventions, the agency may have sufficient data to support a determination of a specific learning disability without any standardized testing of ability and achievement.

However, it should be noted that IDEA requires that:

- A student be evaluated through multiple measures;
- The evaluation cover all areas related to the suspected disability;
- The team making the eligibility decision finds that the deficits are not primarily the result of another disability, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage or limited English proficiency.

In other words, all of the evaluation requirements of the IDEA exist regardless of the data collection option used for SLD determination.

What is Included in the Review of Existing Data?

There are specific points that must be included when reviewing existing data. When the eligibility decision is based primarily on a child's response to intervention, it is vital that this review and documentation be particularly robust. The requirements are noted below along with suggestions for information that would meet the requirements.

Information provided by the parents of the child:

- Current developmental, social, medical, and functional status of the child and other information regarding the child considered relevant by the parent;
- The language and culture of the home and any family history that might have an impact on the child's success in school;
- Student success or frustration with homework and class assignments;

- Level of parent support required for the student to complete assignments.

Information provided by teachers and related service providers:

- Information related to the child's peer relationships, work habits, organizational skills, motivation, behavior and/or self-esteem;
- Educational history including attendance, school transfers, and/or educational opportunity;
- Descriptions of the research-based instruction and tiered interventions that were implemented with the whole group and with targeted populations that included the child;
- Documentation that the instruction and interventions were implemented with fidelity and for sufficient periods of time to ascertain effectiveness.

Current classroom-based assessments

- Performance on teacher-made tests, grades, homework assignments, portfolio information, and other general classroom evaluations;
- Comparative results of progress monitoring from each tier of the instruction/intervention model with comparisons regarding one or more of the following:
 - Level of performance differences¹ against national norms, local (LEA or classroom) norms, or grade-level benchmarks such as provided within DIBELS;
 - Rate of progress differences² measured against relevant peer group with similar interventions;
 - Retention of knowledge differences³ measured against relevant peer group;
 - Intensity of intervention differences⁴ measured against relevant peer group.

Formal assessments

- Performance on State and LEA-wide assessments including the AIMS, TerraNova, AIMS-A, and, if appropriate, language proficiency tests.

¹ Level of performance differences means the child is not learning age/grade-level content in spite of multiple opportunities to learn.

² Rate of progress differences means the child is learning age/grade-level content but progress is substantially slower than expectations and/or that of peers

³ Retention of knowledge differences means that the child seems to learn the age/grade-level content but cannot retain the information/skill for an expected length of time.

⁴ Intensity of intervention differences means that, while the child is making progress, the amount or nature of the intervention required to make progress is not sustainable within general education.

Is Testing a Part of an RTI-based SLD Evaluation?

Once the evaluation team has reviewed all existing data, they must decide if the information is sufficient to make an eligibility decision and to develop an appropriate IEP. In many cases, additional data will need to be collected in order to satisfy all of the IDEA requirements even when the RTI information related to SLD seems definitive. In some cases, the team may decide that additional testing should be completed in order to support the RTI findings or to assist in selecting IEP goals and services.

When the team determines there is no need for additional data, the parents must be informed of the decision, the reasons for the decision, and their right to request additional assessments to assist the team in making a determination of eligibility or education needs. When the team decides that additional information is necessary, informed parental consent must be obtained.

Are the IDEA 60-day Evaluation⁵ Timeline and RTI Process Compatible?

A 60-day timeline exists for initial evaluations and, in Arizona, is measured for parental consent to collect additional data to an eligibility decision. While it is always appropriate for parents to be informed of and participate in decisions regarding general education tiered interventions for their child, the IDEA parental involvement requirements, including procedural safeguards and timelines, do not apply until such time as a special education referral is forthcoming. Parental consent is not required to review the information gathered within the general education process.

However, once parental consent for the collection of information within the special education process is obtained, the public agency must adhere to the 60-day timeframe to complete the evaluation (unless extended by mutual written agreement of the child's parents and the public agency) as well as all IDEA procedural safeguards. In Arizona, a written parental request for a special education evaluation begins the 60-day timeline, regardless of the public agency's usual pre-referral processes.

What Are The Eligibility Consideration For SLD And How Are They Documented?

⁵ The term "evaluation" means the entire process of determine eligibility for special education including the review of existing data, collection of additional data (if appropriate) and an eligibility decision based on all information.

In addition to the general evaluation requirements, the IDEA '04 regulations are highly specific in the requirements related to determining and documenting⁶ the existence of a specific learning disability. These requirements, found in 34 CFR §§300.307-311, include:

- Additional team membership;
- Criteria for the determination of SLD;
- Classroom observations;
- Documentation of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses relative to age, State-approved grade level standards, or intellectual development;
- Documentation that the weaknesses are not a result of other factors;
- For a child who has participated in an RTI process, the instructional strategies, data collected, and parent notification, and;
- Team certification of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination.

Evaluation teams that are considering a determination of a specific learning disability should pay particular attention to these sections of the regulations.

In summary, IDEA requires that public education agencies have in place the following documentation when determining a child is a child with a specific learning disability:

- The child is not achieving adequately for his/her age or to meet state standards;
- The child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weakness relative to age and state standards using an RTI approach, a discrepancy model, or a combination of both;
- The child has been evaluated in all areas related to the suspected disability;
- The child's difficulties are not primarily a result of another disability or cultural, environmental, economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency; and
- The child was provided with appropriate instruction within general education, including documented assessment of achievement over time.

⁶ Additional information related to documentation can be found in the Appendix B.